

VIMALAKIRTI'S DISCOURSE ON EMANCIPATION

(Continued)

TRANSLATED BY PROFESSOR HOKEI IDUMI

CHAPTER 2.

THE WAY OF THE NECESSARY MEANS

At that time, there dwelt, in the great city of Vaiśālī, a wealthy householder named Vimalakīrti. Having done homage to the countless Buddhas of the past, doing many good works, attaining to the acquiescence of the eternal law, he was a man of wonderful eloquence, exercising supernatural powers, obtaining all the Dhāraṇīs, arriving at the state of fearlessness, repressing all evil enmities, reaching the gate of profound truth, walking in the way of wisdom, acquainted with the necessary means, fulfilling the great vows, comprehending the past and future of the intentions of all beings, understanding also both their strength and weakness of mind, ever pure and excellent in the way of the Buddha, remaining loyal to the Mahāyāna, deliberating before action, following the conduct of Buddha, great in mind as the ocean, praised by all the Buddhas, revered by all the disciples and all the gods such as a Śakra and Brāhman king, the lord of this world, residing in Vaiśālī only for the sake of the necessary means for saving creatures, abundantly rich, ever careful of the poor, pure in self-discipline, obedient to all precepts, removing all anger by the practice of patience, removing all sloth by the practice of diligence, removing all distraction of mind by intent meditation, removing all ignorance by fullness of wisdom; though he is but a simple layman, yet observing the pure monastic discipline; though living at home, yet never desirous of anything; though possessing a wife and children, always exercising pure virtues; though surrounded by his family, holding aloof from worldly pleasures;

though using the jewelled ornaments of the world, yet adorned with the spiritual splendour; though eating and drinking, yet enjoying the flavour of the rapture of meditation; though frequenting the gambling house, yet leading the gamblers into the right path; though coming in contact with heresy, yet never letting his true faith be impaired; though having a profound knowledge of worldly learning, yet never finding pleasure in things of the spirit as taught by Buddha; revered by all as the first among those who were worthy of reverence; governing both the old and young as a righteous judge; though profiting by all the professions, yet far above being absorbed by them; benefitting all beings, going wheresoever he pleases, protecting all beings as a judge with righteousness; leading all with the doctrine of the Mahayana when in the seat of discussion; ever teaching the young and ignorant when entering the hall of learning; manifesting to all the error of passion when in the house of debauchery; persuading all to seek the higher things, when at the shop of the wine dealer; preaching the law, when among wealthy people as the most honourable of their kind; dissuading the rich householders from covetousness, when among them as the most honourable of their kind; teaching Kshatriyas patience when among them, as the most honourable of their kind; removing arrogance when among Brahmans as the most honourable of their kind; teaching justice to the great ministers when among them as the most honourable of their kind; teaching loyalty and filial piety to the princes when among them as the most honourable of their kind; teaching honesty to the ladies of the court when among them as the most honourable of their kind; persuading the masses to cherish the virtue of merits when among them as the most honourable of their kind; instruct the highest wisdom to the Brahman gods when among them as the most honourable of their kind; showing the transient nature of the world to the Sakra gods when among them as the most honourable of their kind; protecting all beings when among the guardians as the most

honourable of their kind;—thus by such countless means Vimalakīrti, the wealthy householder, rendered benefit to all beings.

Now through those means he brought on himself sickness. And there came to inquire after him countless visitors headed by kings, great ministers, wealthy householders, lay-disciples, Brahman princes and other high officials. Then Vimalakīrti taking the opportunity of his sickness, preached to any one who came to him, and said: “Come, ye gentlemen, the human body is transient, weak, impotent, frail, and mortal; never trustworthy, because it suffers when attacked by disease; ye gentlemen, an intelligent man never places his trust in such a thing; it is like a bubble that soon bursts. It is like a mirage which appears because of a thirsty desire. It is like a plantain tree which is hollow inside. It is like a phantom caused by a conjurer. It is like a dream giving false ideas. It is like a shadow which is produced by Karma. It is like an echo which is produced by various relations. It is like a floating cloud which changes and vanishes. It is like the lightning which instantly comes and goes. It has no power as the earth has none. It has no individuality as the fire has none. It has no durability as the wind has none. It has no personality as the water has none. It is not real and the four elements are its house. It is empty when freed from the false idea of me and mine. It has no consciousness as there is none in grasses, trees, bricks or stones. It is impotent as it is revolved by the power of the wind. It is impure and full of filthiness. It is false and will be reduced to nothingness, in spite of bathing, clothing or nourishment. It is a calamity and subject to a hundred and one diseases. It is like a dry well threatened by decay. It is transient and surely to die. It is like a poisonous snake or the hateful enemies or the deserted village as it is composed of the (five) Skandhas, the (twelve) Āyatanas and the (eighteen) Dhātus.

“O ye gentlemen, this body of ours is to be abhorred, and the body of Buddha is to be desired. And why? The

body of Buddha is the body of the law. It is born of immeasurable virtues and wisdom. It is born of discipline, meditation, wisdom, emancipation, wisdom of emancipation. It is born of mercy, compassion, joy, and impartiality. It is born of charity, discipline, patience, diligence, meditation, emancipation, samādhi, learning, meekness, strength, wisdom, and all the Pāramitās. It is born of the necessary means. It is born of the six supernatural powers. It is born of the threefold intelligence. It is born of the thirty-seven requisites of enlightenment. It is born of the concentration and contemplation of mind. It is born of the ten powers, threefold fearlessness and the eighteen special faculties. It is born by uprooting all wicked deeds and by accumulating all good deeds. It is born of truth. It is born of temperance. Of these immeasurable pure virtues is born the body of Tathagata. Ye gentlemen, if one wishes to obtain the body of Buddha and exterminate the diseases of all beings he should cherish the thought of supreme enlightenment."

Thus Vimalakīrti, the wealthy householder, rightly preached for the profit of those who came to visit him on his bed of sickness and made all these countless thousand people cherish the thought of supreme enlightenment.

CHAPTER 3.

THE DISCIPLES

At that time, Vimalakīrti, the wealthy householder, thought to himself thus: "I am on a bed of sickness; surely the Blessed One who possesses great mercy would never leave me unregarded."

Buddha knowing his thought said to Śāriputra: "Go thou to Vimalakīrti and inquire after his health." Śāriputra replied to Buddha and said: "Nay, O Lord, I am not worthy to go and inquire after his health. And why? I remember one day

I was quietly seated meditating under a tree in a forest; then Vimalakīrti came to me and said: 'Well O Śāriputra, to sit thus is not necessarily a quiet sitting. To sit quietly means to withdraw both mind and body from the triple world. Not to rise from the meditation of cessation (i. e., absolute tranquillity) and yet to exercise all manners of daily life, — this is to sit quietly. Following the manner of ordinary people without renouncing the righteous law, — this is to sit quietly. Not to make the mind abide neither within nor without, — this is to sit quietly. Not to be influenced by the heretical views and yet to practise the thirty-seven requisites for attaining the supreme enlightenment, — this is to sit quietly. If one should thus sit he would be approved by Buddha.' At that time, O Blessed One, hearing these remarks, I remained in silence and was unable to reply. Therefore, I am not worthy to go and inquire after his health."

Buddha then said to Mahāmaudgalyāyana: "Go thou to Vimalakīrti to inquire after his health." Mahāmaudgalyāyana replied to Buddha and said: Nay, O Lord, I am not worthy to go and inquire after his health. And why? I remember one day I went into the great city of Vaiśālī and was preaching the law to the people in the streets, Vimalakīrti came to me and said: 'Well, O Mahāmaudgalyāyana, to preach the law to the people should not be done in the manner you do. If the law should be preached at all, it should be done in accordance with the Dharma. There are no created beings in the law, because it is free from their taints. There is no self in it, because it is free from its taints. There is no durability in it, because there is neither birth nor death. There is no personality in it, because there is neither the past nor the future. The law is ever serene as it is far above all forms. The law has no name as it is above words. There is no preaching in it because it is beyond sense and meditation. It has no form as it is like the sky. There is no idle talk in it as it is absolute emptiness. There is no thought of selfhood

in it as it is free from the thought of selfhood. It has no discrimination as it is free from all consciousness. There is no object of comparison in it as there is no relativity. It is subject to neither primary nor secondary causation. It is identical with the essence of things as it is immanent in them all. It is in accordance with the truth as it has nothing to be in accordance with. It abides in the ultimate reality as it remains unmoved on all sides. It is immovable as it does not depend on the six sense-objects. It neither comes nor goes as it is ever changing. It is in accordance with emptiness, formlessness, and aimlessness. It is above handsomeness or ugliness. It knows neither increase nor decrease. It knows neither birth nor death. It has no place of attachment. It is beyond eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. It knows neither altitude. The law ever is, ever abiding and immovable. The law is far above all thought and all work. Well, O Mahāmaudgalyāyana, the nature of the law being thus, how can we preach it? On the part of the preacher there is nothing to preach or declare, and on the part of the hearer nothing to hear or to obtain. Like a magician who preaches to an audience magic-created, are we to preach the law to a phantom audience. One should preach the law in this spirit. Indeed, to preach the law, one should understand various degrees of capacity in beings, be well provided with an intelligence which knows no impediment, with a great heart of compassion, and praise the Mahāyāna, thinking how to requite the grace of Buddha and how to make the three treasures abiding.' When Vimalakīrti spoke thus, eight hundred householders cherished the thought of supreme enlightenment. As I have no such eloquence, I am not worthy to go and inquire after his health."

Buddha then said to Mahākāśyapa: "Go thou to Vimalakīrti to inquire after his health." Mahākāśyapa replied to Buddha and said: "O Blessed One, I am not worthy to go and inquire after his health. And why? I remember once I was begging alms in a poor village, then Vimalakīrti came to me and said: "Well, O Mahākāśyapa, though thou possessest

compassionate heart, yet thy compassion cannot be universal, because abandoning the rich thou seekest only the poor in thy begging of alms. O Mahākāśyapa, thou shouldst abide in the way of sameness and beg alms of all, each in its turn. The begging of alms should be done not for the sake of merely bodily nourishment. Thou shouldst receive the rice-ball in order to break up the form of combination. Thou shouldst accept food not cherishing the thought of acceptance. Thou shouldst enter into a village as if it were deserted. Colours should be perceived as if by a blind man. Voice should be heard as if it were an echo. Odour should be perceived as if it were a wind. Taste should be tasted without being affected by taste. Thou shouldst regard all things as illusory, as destitute of selfness as well as otherness, as neither burning by themselves nor going to extinction. O Kāśyapa, if thou, not abandoning the eightfold path of wrong-doing, enter into the eightfold emancipation, and not abandoning false forms enter into the true law, and give one dish of food to all beings and make offerings to all the Buddhas, and Holies then thou mayest take food. One who eats in such a manner neither with passions nor without them, is neither engaged in meditation nor awakeved from it, abide neither in this world nor in Nirvana. In giving there are no merits, great or small, nor should the giver have any thought of gain or loss.

‘This is the way of directly entering the path of Buddha and not that of the Śrāvakas. O Kāśyapa, if thou eatest in such a manner thou partakest not in vain of others’ alms.’ When, O Blessed One, I heard these remarks, I felt that I had never heard the like before, then began deeply to revere all the Bodhisattvas and thought thus: ‘Though still remaining as simple layman, yet such is his eloquence. Who [hearing him] cherishes not the thought of supreme enlightenment? Since that time, I have never persuaded people to the practice of Śrāvakas or the Pratyeka-Buddhas. Therefore, I am not worthy to inquire after his health.’

Buddha then said to Subhūti: "Go thou to Vimalakīrti to inquire after his health." Subhūti replied to Buddha and said: "O Blessed One, I am not worthy to go and inquire after his health. And why? I remember one day I went into his house begging an alms. Then Vimalakīrti taking the bowl from me and having filled it with boiled rice, said to me: Well, O Subhūti, if a man is able to see sameness in food he will see sameness in everything too. If a man sees sameness in everything, he sees sameness in food too. By begging an alms in this manner he is able to take food.

'If, O Subhūti, thou be above lust, anger, or ignorance, without extirpating them; if thou assume an absolute form without destroying the body; if thou attain to intelligence and emancipation without exterminating ignorance and desire; if thou obtain emancipation of the five unpardonable sins in spite of being in a state neither released nor bound; if thou never see the four noble truths and yet remain not blind to them; if thou attain to the result of full enlightenment without going above thy mortal nature; if thou be neither a common being nor a no-common being; if thou be neither a saint nor a no-saint; if thou be endowed with things yet transcend their nature, — then thou canst take this food.

'O Subhūti, if thou seest not Buddha, hearest not his doctrine, but dost follow the six teachers of hearsy such as Purāṇa-Kāśyapa, Maskari-Gosariputra, Sañjya-Vairatiputra, Ajita-Késakambala, Karakuda-Kātāyana, and Nirgrantha-Jñatiputra, making them thy teachers, entering into their orders, following what they erroneously teach, then thou wouldst be able to take this food.

'O Subhūti, if thou followest heresy and arrivest not at the other shore; if thou abidest with the eight difficulties and never strivest to be free from them; if thou caressest passions and keepest thyself away from impure objects; — then thou obtainest the Samādhi of non-resistance, and all beings will also obtain the Samādhi. One who gives alms to thee never makes for

himself a heap of merit; one who offers food to thee enters the three unhappy regions. If thou shouldst make thyself a friend of all passions helping all the evil ones; if thou renderest thyself entirely identical with all the evils and all the passions; if thou cherishest a hostile heart against all beings; and abusest all the Buddhas and their doctrines; if thou shouldst never enter into the order and never enter into Nirvana;—if thou shouldst be thus, then thou wouldst be able to take this food.’

“Then, O World-honoured One, hearing these words I remained stupefied, not understanding what was meant and not knowing what answer to make; but silently leaving my bowl I was about to depart from his house, when Vimalakīrti said: ‘Well, O Subhūti, take thy bowl and fear not. What thinkest thou if a phantom being produced by Tathagata spoke those words? Is there any fear in thy mind?’ I replied: ‘Nay.’ Vimalakīrti said: ‘All things are of illusory character. Thou needest have no fear. And why? All things are never above such illusory nature. An intelligent man never adheres to words; therefore he has no fears. And why? The nature of words is not characterised by such words as being or non-being. [When this is understood,] there is emancipation, and emancipation manifests itself in all things.’

“When Vimalakīrti spoke thus, two hundred deities attained to the pure-eye of the law. Therefore, I am not worthy to go and inquire after his health.”

Buddha then said to Purana-Maitrayaniputra, “Go thou to Vimalakīrti and inquire after his health.” Purana replied to Buddha and said, “O World-honoured One, I am not worthy to go and inquire after his health. And why? I remember one day I was preaching the law to the novices under a tree in a forest. Then Vimalakīrti came to me and said: ‘Well, O Purana, thou shouldst enter into meditation and examine the minds of those people before thou wouldst preach. Filthy food should never be put into a jewelled bowl. Thou shouldst know the thoughts of those Bhikshus. A beryl should not be

taken for a crystal. Thou canst not know the sources of those beings. Never try to awaken them to enlightenment by the doctrine of the Hinayana. Never hurt him whose body is unwounded. A narrow path should not be shown to him who wishes to walk a broad path. A great ocean can never be put into the foot-print of a cow. The light of a fire-fly should never be deemed equal to the light of the sun.

“O Purana, those Bhikshus cherished the thought of the Mahayana in days gone by, yet forgot it only for a period. How can they be taught and led by the doctrine of the Hinayana? I know that the Hinayana knowledge is, like the blind, limited, superficial, and can not discern different capacities of all things.

“Then Vimalakīrti having entered into meditation, restored to those Bhikshus the consciousness of their former existences, during which they had done many meritorious works under five hundred Buddhas, whereby they wished to turn their minds towards the attainment of supreme enlightenment. When they suddenly thus realised the true nature of their minds they prostrated themselves and worshipped Vimalakīrti with their faces touching his feet. Then Vimalakīrti preached the law unto them and their minds never retreated in supreme enlightenment. Since that time, I am convinced that no Śrāvakas, being incapable of understanding of others' faculties, ought to preach the law. Therefore, I am not worthy to go and inquire after his health.”

Buddha then said to Mahākātyāyana, “Go thou to Vimalakīrti to inquire after his health.” Mahākātyāyana replied to Buddha and said: “O Blessed One, I am not worthy to go and inquire after his health. And why? I remember one day I was discoursing on the ideas of transitoriness, suffering, emptiness, selflessness, and tranquility. Then Vimalakīrti came to me and said: ‘Well, O Kātyāyana, measuring with thy mortal ideas thou shouldst not preach the law which is absolute. O Kātyāyana, the law is in its nature neither mortal nor immortal; this is the meaning of suffering. All things have

ultimately no reality; this is the meaning of emptiness. Self and selflessness are identical; this is the meaning of selflessness. Nothing has either beginning or end; this is the meaning of annihilation. When he had preached thus, minds of Bhikshus attained to emancipation. Therefore, I am not worthy to go and inquire after his health."

Buddha then said to Aniruddha, "Go thou to Vimalakirti and inquire after his health." Aniruddha replied to Buddha and said: "O Blessed One, I am not worthy to go and inquire after his health. And why? I remember once I was walking in a certain place.¹ At that time, a Brahman deity, all shining in pure brilliancy, came to me, and worshipping me with his face which touched my feet, said to me, 'Tell me how many regions thou canst see, O Aniruddha.'² I replied to him, 'Well' O Angel, I can see these three great Chilocosms belonging to the land of Śakyamuni even as at an Amra fruit in the hand.'³ Then Vimalakirti came to me and said: 'Well, O Aniruddha, tell me, is thy supernatural sight a created thing, or is it one of the five miraculous powers of the heretic teachers? If it is not a created thing, it would be functionless, and should be incapable of seeing.' Then, O Blessed One, I remained silent. But those Brahman deities, having heard his words, thought that they had never heard the like before and asked him with bowed heads, 'Tell me who of all men in the world has the true supernatural sight.' Vimalakirti replied, 'Buddha, the World Honoured One, alone has attained to the true supernatural sight. He ever in contemplation sees all the Buddha countries far beyond the duality of things.' Then Vyhūa-Suddha, the Brahman deity and his relatives, the five hundred Brahman

¹ Walking was the daily custom among Buddhist mendicants. They circulate after meals about the temple or in the forest near the monastery. During their walk they recite certain holy names or some portions of the scriptures.

² It is said that Aniruddha was the one who was most richly endowed with supernatural sight among the disciples of Sakyamuni.

³ Amra, *Mangifera indica*, Linn. mango fruit.

deities, all cherished the thought of supreme enlightenment, worshipping Vimalakīrti with their faces touching his feet, and they suddenly disappeared. Therefore, I am not worthy to go and inquire after his health."

Buddha then said to Upāli, "Go thou to Vimalakīrti and inquire after his health." Upāli replied to Buddha and said: "O Blessed One, I am not worthy to go and inquire after his health. And why? I remember at one time there were two Bhikshus who had committed a breach of discipline.¹ Full of shame they dared not confess it in the presence of Buddha but came to me and said: 'O Upāli, we have committed a breach of discipline and are too ashamed to confess it in the presence of our Lord. We beseech thee for this only that thou will show us the way how to be made free from the sin which causes us doubt and contrition.' I preached to them the law according to the doctrine of discipline. Then Vimalakīrti came to me and said: 'Well, O Upāli, thou shouldst not increase the burden of those poor Bhikshus, rather shouldst thou directly exterminate their pain of contrition instead of disturbing their minds. And why? The nature of sin is neither within nor in the midst; as it is taught by Buddha, all beings are unclean when their minds are unclean; all beings are pure when their minds are pure; the mind is neither within nor without nor in the midst, and so all things are as the mind is.

'O Upāli, when one's mind attains to emancipation by means of meditation, is there any uncleanliness in the mind?' I replied, 'Nay, none.' Vimalakīrti said: 'Even so it is with the minds of all beings. O Upāli, a false idea is uncleanliness, being free from false ideas is pureness; O Upāli, all things are

¹ Nothing is mentioned in the original text as to what trespass against this discipline they have committed. But one of the commentators tells us that one of them was in doubt whether he had committed misconduct with a woman who was gathering fagots while he was sleeping in a shade; and the other was full of contrition as if he had murdered that woman because he seeing her coming to him for the purpose of seducing him, had struck her in his anger so violently that she ran away from him, fell into a pit, and died.

transient; nothing remains unchanged; they are like a phantom or a flash of lightning; nothing waits for another; nothing continues in a stay; all things are illusions; they are as dreams, a mirage, the moon reflected in the water, reflections in a mirror, caused only by false ideas. One who knows this is said to be obedient to discipline, and one who knows this is said to be learned.'

"Then those two Bhikshus said: 'What profound wisdom he possesses, even Upāli cannot be his equal, Upāli who is the first among all the disciples in the observance of discipline, cannot discourse with him.' I remarked, 'Except for Tathagata there are no Śrāvakas, Bodhisattvas, who can stand his irrepressible eloquence which can fulfill every desire, such is his wisdom.' At that time the two Bhikshus had their fear and contrition terminated and whereby the thought of supreme enlightenment was awakened in them; they made this vow: 'May all beings attain such eloquence as that!' Therefore, I am not worthy to go and inquire after his health."

Buddha then said to Rahula; "Go thou to Vimalakīrti to inquire after his health." Rahula replied to Buddha and said: "O Blessed One, I am not worthy to go and inquire after his health. And why? I remember one day the sons of the wealthy householders of Vaiśālī came to me with bowed heads and questioned me: 'Well, O Rahula, thou art the only son of Buddha who has relinquished the throne of a Cakravartin king and hast renounced the world for the purpose of attaining enlightenment. Now tell us what are the advantages of renunciation according to the doctrine.'

"At that time Vimalakīrti came to me and said: 'Well, O Rahula, thou shouldst not preach to them the advantages of renunciation. And why? Not to have any advantages or merits — this is renunciation. It is a created thing of which we can speak as having any advantages or merits; but renunciation is an uncreated thing, and in an uncreated thing, there are neither advantages nor merits to talk about. O Rahula, renun-

ciation is neither this nor that nor between. It is beyond the sixty-two heresies. It abides in Nirvana attained by the intelligent only. It is walked by the saints alone. If you could subdue evil ones, transcend the five paths of existence, purify the five sights,¹ acquire the five powers, establish the five faculties, were not annoyed by outside things; if you could deliver one from all kinds of wickedness, crush all the heresies, go beyond the unsubstantiality of names, be emerged from muddy pollution; if you were without attachment, free from the idea of possession, free from clinging, not disturbed, and could feel inward joy, watch over others, abide in contemplation, and keep yourself away from all faults:—if you could do these, then you would be said to have true renunciation.'

"Vimalakīrti then spoke to the sons of the wealthy householders and said: 'Ye shall practise renunciation according to the true law. And why? Buddha is seldom seen in this world.' The sons of the wealthy householders said: 'O Sir, we have heard that Buddha said that if it were not permitted by parents no one could renounce the world.' Vimalakīrti said: 'Well, yet if ye cherished the thought of supreme enlightenment this is renunciation, this is perfect fulfilment. At that time thirty-two sons of the wealthy householders all cherished the thought of supreme enlightenment. Therefore, I am not worthy to go and inquire after his health.'

Buddha then said to Ānanda: "Go thou to Vimalakīrti and inquire after his health." Ānanda replied to Buddha and said: "O Blessed One, I am not worthy to go and inquire after his health. And why? I remember one day my Lord had been somewhat indisposed. Some milk was required to restore him to health. Therefore, holding a bowl in my hand, I stood at door of a wealthy Brahman. Then Vimalakīrti came to me and said: 'Well, O Ānanda, why dost thou stand here so early in the morning with a bowl in thy hand?' I replied: 'O Sir, our Lord is somewhat indisposed. Some milk is

¹ Five sights are: fleshly, divine, true, intelligent, and enlightened sights.

inquired to restore him to health. Therefore, I am here with a bowl in my hand! Vimalakirti said: 'Stay! stay! Ananda, never utter such words; the body of Tathagata possesses the nature of adamant, as in him all wickedness is exterminated, and all goodness is combined together: What illness, what suffering could he suffer? Go thou away in silence. O Ānanda, thou shouldst not insult Tathagata; thou shouldst not let strangers hear these coarse words, thou shouldst not let the deities who have great dignity, and by Bodhisattvas who have come from the pure lands of the other quarters, hear these words, O Ānanda, even Cakravartin, the sacred king even on account of his little merit, is free from illness; how much more would it not be so with Tathagata who, having accumulated infinite merits, surpasses all? Go thou away, O Ānanda: let us not endure such an insult. If the heretical teachers hear this, they might think thus; "Could he be a teacher, who is incapable even of curing his own illness, while pretending to cure the diseases of others?" Go thou away in haste and in silence; never again be heard by anybody. O Ānanda, thou shouldst know that the body of Tathagata is the body of the law. It is not the body of desire; Buddha is the world-honoured one above the three states of existence. The body of Tathagata is above numbers.¹ The body of Tathagata is uncreated. What illness can such a body suffer?'

"Then, O Blessed One, I was full of shame, thinking thus: 'Might I not probably have misunderstood our Lord even in spite of my nearness to him?' And there was heard a voice from above, declaring: 'O Ānanda, true is that which is said by this man; yet the Buddha who made his appearance in the wicked world of the fivefold corruption² has brought illness on himself only in order to awaken all beings to

¹ Numbers mean the five Skandhas, the twelve Ayatans, and the eighteen Dhātus, which are the component parts of the human body.

² Fivefold corruption: corruption of the present Kalpa, mankind, belief, life, and passions. SBE. XLIX. Part 2, p. 102.

emancipation. Go thou, O Ānanda; never be ashamed of begging for milk.' O Blessed One, such is his wisdom and eloquence. Therefore, I am not worthy to go and inquire after his health."

Thus five hundred great disciples each relating his story, praising the words of Vimalakīrti, declared themselves unworthy to go and inquire after his health.